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Book Review: Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis

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Earls: Book Review: *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and servants, leaders, and planters; partnerships and resources in church planting; and planting churches with kingdom impact. Numerous case studies and sidebars pepper the pages. The works cited section comprises twenty-two pages, and the book concludes with a helpful index.*

The authors provide depth of topic, comprehensiveness, connections and challenges to the past, new configurations, fairness toward those with whom they disagree, clarity of content, a strong connection to Scripture, an holistic approach to ministry, multiple practical applications, some denominational assumptions, numerous lists of best practices, and a strong bibliography.

Here are few additions I would love to see incorporated into the first revision of this book. First, rather than tell the reader to be contextual, the authors should raise specific cultural questions for each area that will provide the answers. For example, in relation to pedagogy, how does the host culture learn or teach others? Second, the authors should show the church planter how to make a tighter connection between evangelism and follow up. Third, at least 30–40 percent of the “global” audience are not primarily oral learners. So, how does secondary orality play out for a post-modern audience in the various contexts? Lastly, as more and more western long-termers and short-termers find their callings not as pioneer church planters but rather as facilitators working with existing churches abroad, how will this change impact the selection, training, and mentoring of planters? How will this change affect the pioneer role of church planter?

Thank you, Craig and Gene, for providing us an excellent work that will prove to be instrumental in reaching the one-third of the world that remains without a church.

Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008, 224 pp., \$15.99.

Reviewed by Rod Earls, Ph.D.. Earls is the Director of Missions for the Central Valley Baptist Association in Turlock, California, and Assistant Professor with Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary.

Steve Timmis pastored a “traditional church” which for all intents and purposes was growing and healthy. However, his heart stayed arrested by the fact that so many “outsiders” were not hearing the Gospel and being impacted by the love of Christ through Christian witness. He believed that somehow church life and ministry had to be accomplished in a different fashion. Tim Chester grew up in the home of a pastor and often discussed ecclesiological issues with his father. He

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had several ministry experiences during his university days that increased his hunger to see the local church be vibrant and fruitful in Christ's work. Together, Chester and Timmis worked to found a church planting movement in northern England called Crowded House. Their book is written to challenge the conventional thinking of what the local church is to be and do, while asking, "What does Jesus call us to?"

Chester and Timmis give notice throughout their book that they desire that local churches be "Gospel-centered" and "community-centered." They are without apology committed to the authority of the Word of God. Their concepts for community-centered local church practice is stimulating and challenging, for it is all about lives being transformed by Christ. Their confession is that "The theology that matters is not the theology we profess but the theology we practice" (18).

Crowded House is a network of house church-type ministries. While Chester and Timmis are clear that they do not believe that all ministries should be accomplished by this same paradigm, they write, "It is our conviction that the principles we outline can and should be applied to all congregations" (19).

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The authors advocate that every child of God has the ability to minister, evangelize, and do significant mission work. In this book, "gospel-centeredness" means that churches live by missions. The authors note, "We need non-full-time leaders who can model whole-life, gospel-centered, missional living" (37).

Evangelism and ministry is accomplished through "life-on-life." Following Paul's words, "We love you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2:8), the authors work to practice an incarnational lifestyle. Chester and Timmis promote and instill the value of seeing work places, residences, community involvements (sports leagues, social events/places, etc.) as places of mission work.

They advocate that congregations should be kept small in size to keep the focus on accountability and mission commitment. They write, "We try to create this culture by regularly teaching our values, celebrating gospel opportunities, setting aside time each Sunday to share what we have been doing, 'commissioning' people as missionaries in their workplaces and social clubs. Above all we model the culture for one another so that it becomes the normal thing to do" (65).

The authors especially value ministering to the poor and marginalized, noting Jesus' ministry was especially directed to these. They write, "Poverty is also isolation, powerlessness, and vulnerability. . . . [T]hey [the poor] need inclusion to replace their exclusion; to replace their powerlessness they need a place where they matter. They need community. . . . They need the church" (80).

mission as a fire exists by burning” (86). Their simple practice of church allows a sure and simple focus on multiplying disciples and churches—in their practice of meeting in homes. They share, “Small communities . . . create a *simplicity* that militates against a maintenance mentality: there are no expensive buildings to maintain or complex programs to run” (93).

The authors believe the small size of the congregations allows for the development of a strong culture of making disciples. This church practice encourages and allows leaders to develop who can eventually lead new, developing house churches. Chester and Timmis see disciples and churches multiplied through this simple structure and practice. They practice a community hermeneutic whereby they collectively discuss the Bible during their sermon times. They also practice a community apologetic, meaning that through their unity they give strong credibility to the Gospel. They believe the family is the model to guide church life. ““In Pauline thought the family image occupies the primary role in his reflection on the nature and mission of the messianic community”” (190).

This book has several strengths. Chester and Timmis maintain a clear commitment to Scripture throughout their work. Their value of evangelism and discipling is outstanding. They have done an unusually good work in presenting the value and practice of applying John 13:34–35 as their basis for community practice. They take seriously the call to show love to one another as Christians, and to do so in practical ways which will directly encourage growth in holiness and obedience to Christ’s mandate to make disciple-making disciples.

Their high value of the Gospel and community was well documented in how they presented pastoral care in the Crowded House ministries. When faced with unhealthy dependencies or psychological problems, they pursue loving accountability relationships and include a great deal of sharing the Word of God with the person(s) in need.

The ideas posited were well anchored in church history and research of respected church leaders throughout the centuries. This is not some Christian pop-culture book with prejudicial arguments. The authors maintain a mission-centric theology in all of their ideas and application of Scripture.

A few limitations are noteworthy. Although the authors state in the introduction their way is not the only way, there is much presented in the book on what is wrong with large churches. They write, “Too many of our notions of success owe more to the world than to the God we worship. We measure success in terms of numbers, budgets, style, staff, prestige” (191). In their concluding remarks

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about larger congregations versus more congregations, there is no discussion of how large churches can be multiplying churches. It would be interesting to see the authors' principles filtered through the G-12 cell church strategy followed by César Castellanos and Lawrence Khong. A discussion of the South Korean work of multiplying disciples and large churches would have been a helpful illustration of how these principles can be practiced with churches of large sizes.

We all are passionate about particular values in Christ's work because of our giftings and pilgrimages. This is God's wonderful sovereign work of making sure His Son's message and love is distributed over this world. Chester and Timmis have experienced life paths which have sovereignly prepared them to be passionate for Christ's work in the way they are doing Christianity. Their genuineness and authentic application of the Great Commandment and Great Commission gives the church solid encouragement. Their story challenges every church leader to believe in the laity and their potential to multiply disciples and churches. We must devise ways to allow them to do ministry and missions. Chester and Timmis have shown us a viable picture of what this growth can look like.

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Daniel White Hodge, *The Soul of Hip Hop: Rims, Timbs and a Cultural Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Books, 2010, 250 pp., \$17.00.

Reviewed by Steven Ybarrola, Ph.D., Professor of Cultural Anthropology, Asbury Theological Seminary

Daniel White Hodge earned his Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and is currently adjunct professor at Azusa Pacific University and Citrus College. He is also involved in urban ministry with the Urban Youth Workers Institute and as a national trainer for the Christian Community Development Association. Hodge is ideally suited to write a book on Hip Hop culture and theology since, as he tells us in the introduction, he was profoundly affected as a youth by the rap music associated with this subculture. After receiving Christ and being baptized, he viewed such Hip Hop leaders as Tupac Shakur as "blasphemers" and preached that Hip Hop was "from the devil" (19). However, four years later, he began to reevaluate Hip Hop and "found a deeper message within the music, genre, and people that were involved in the culture" than he had before (20). As a result, Hodge represents the perspective of a critical insider, which is very valuable in understanding a subculture that is probably foreign to most of us and considered evil and reprobate by much of the evangelical community.